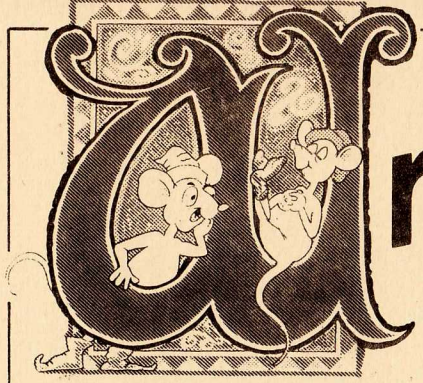
RM User Magazine

Volume 5:2 July 1990



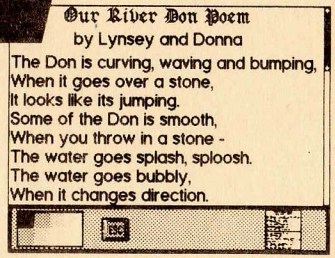
Write On!

The word processor that grows up with your pupils.

A revolutionary new word processor from SPA – in full colour! Choose exactly how you want *WriteOn* to appear. Beginners can use a very simple screen; more confident pupils can have access to *WriteOn's* advanced features step by step. And pupils can include PaintSpa or NewSPAper pictures into their documents.

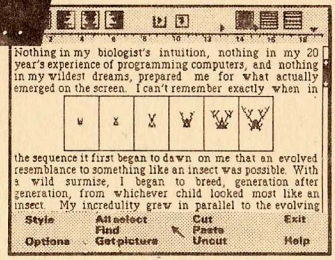
For the beginner . . .

- Full *WYSIWYG* word processing
- Simple, uncluttered screen
- Choice of easy-to-read typefaces
- Type in colour or black and white
- Print out with a single key combination


Our River Don Poem
by Lynsey and Donna
The Don is curving, waving and bumping,
When it goes over a stone,
It looks like its jumping.
Some of the Don is smooth,
When you throw in a stone -
The water goes splash, sploosh.
The water goes bubbly,
When it changes direction.

For more advanced users . . .

- Variable margins and tab stops
- Formatting ruler display
- Include page breaks and footers
- Easy-to-use foreign accents
- Short cuts with function or CTRL keys


Nothing in my biologist's intuition, nothing in my 20 year's experience of programming computers, and nothing in my wildest dreams, prepared me for what actually emerged on the screen. I can't remember exactly when in
the sequence it first began to dawn on me that an evolved resemblance to something like an insect was possible. With a wild surmise, I began to breed, generation after generation, from whichever child looked most like an insect. My incredulity grew in parallel to the evolving
Style
All select
Cut
Exit
Find
Paste
Options
Get picture
Uncut
Help

SPA

WriteOn is available now for Nimbus; for IBM soon.
Nimbus or IBM £39 + VAT Nimbus network or IBM site licence £109 + VAT

PO BOX 59, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV31 3QA
Telephone (0926) 422959

HELP-LINE

The User Group contains a great body of expertise amongst its members and the help-line exists to act as a channel for spreading knowledge and especially answers to your problems.

Remember, your problems are also our problems!

If you are in difficulty, please feel free to **ring anybody on the Committee** (see inside back cover for numbers and note that Helen and John Williams have an answering machine. If you're not sure who to phone then leave a message there and they will redirect it). We may not, individually, know the answers, but we hope that we may know someone who knows someone who.....!
You may also telephone Tim Philips on 0284 706623, especially regarding 380Z or PC186 problems and Keith Whiddon on 0403 217339, particularly about Nimbus systems. Both numbers are home numbers. My thanks to Tim and Keith for volunteering.

Remember, the Group is on TELECOM GOLD 83:JNL585
Do feel free to write either to the Editor or the Secretary. This may be especially useful if the problem is complicated and non-urgent.

Advertising in the Magazine

Full- and half-page advertisements can be placed in the Magazine and details can be obtained from the Advertising Manager (address on Committee Page at back). We also take classified ads and members may place free ads for surplus kit in Micro-Mart, provided a valid membership number is quoted with the ad.

Rates

Back Cover: £75 Inside Cover: £60 Full Page: £50

Half-page: £30 Classified: £5 / 100 words

These rates assume black-on-white, camera-ready copy. Please avoid dot-matrix output. Typesetting is charged at cost and is additional to the above rates. Classified ads must be pre-paid, cheques for £5 payable to RM User Group.

The deadline for the next issue is **October 1st 1990**

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Editorial and News

Probably the biggest news this month is the launch of Windows 3; if you've not already heard about it then see page 9 for my first impressions.

There are some software changes to the network library. From 1 May all new servers are entitled to the new library but it will not actually be shipped until mid-July. The changes are all worthwhile; Flexicad (from Flexible Software, the people who brought you Oxfordshire Write) replaces RM CAD. I'm told that this is a very easy to use but useful program. More comments when my copy is delivered. PaintSPA replaces PC Paintbrush, and not before time in my humble opinion. I know that Paintbrush is very capable but its idiosyncratic use of the mouse and the jerky way everything happens on screen really put me off. Its only saving grace was that it saved pictures in small files. Quest is replaced by Qwest (which is Quest for Windows) and Keystroke replaces Touch'n'Go. Word for Windows is added to the library and a very welcome addition it is.

If you want to upgrade your network all the applications except Word for Windows are available for £99 (order code 026-216), which seems very reasonable, and Word for Windows is available at £75 (026-215).

I mentioned the music turnkey system in the last issue. I've now had a chance to see it and it looks impressive. In case you missed it it is based on a PC 286 and comes with a MIDI interface and a Roland CM32L sound synthesiser. The software supplied is Ballade by DynaWare. All you need to add is a MIDI keyboard, which ideally should be touch sensitive. This means, in non-musician terms, that the harder you hit it, the louder the noise you get. It looks good, sounds impressive and seems fairly easy to use. Music is displayed properly on screen and can be entered either by using a mouse or by playing on the keyboard and recording what you play. The synthesiser supports a huge range of sounds and you can also make up your own. Composer Plus will be based around the next launch of Ballade and should now be available in the autumn term.

Superbase 4 is now available from RM (I still want a Windows database with the network; perhaps the next revision will include it?). PC Globe is a fascinating database containing a wide variety of information on the countries of the world. It runs under SETPC on a PC186 but looks much better on a 286 or 386. Windows Express was reviewed here a few months ago and it is now available from RM.

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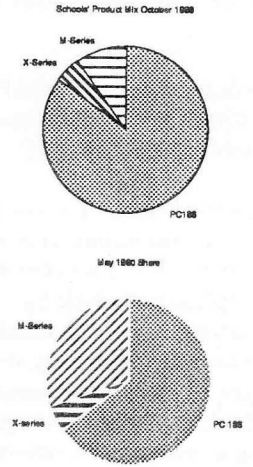
A new card for M-series machines gives BBC input/output capabilities. It offers 4 analogue channels, and parallel printer and user ports compatible with the BBC model B. Analogue input was one of the best features of the BBC. The ease with which you could connect a thermistor or light dependent resistor into a couple of other components and dangle the whole lot off the back of the machine allowed for some interesting science experiments. It's a great pity that IBM didn't put something similar on their computer because then other manufacturers might have followed suit.

Sales continue to grow. RM record a sizeable growth in the use of M series machines in schools (this is certainly shown in your membership returns). The price difference between the 186 and 286 is now so small that it really is worth considering getting the 286 if you can afford it. The graphics are very much better, as is the processing speed. The fact that it really is IBM compatible means that you can run almost any software, Nimbus or IBM without problems.



The graphs show the UK schools product mix as it changed from late 1989 to May this year. They were produced using Excel and are not exact; few schools buy X series machines except as servers (which are almost exclusively X series) so I increased the size of the slice so that it would show clearly! Apologies to the mathematical purists and to RM for distorting their sales figures!

Help Wanted

Charles Price is a member of a parent/staff group at a local authority nursery in London and would like to make contact with users who can help. He would also like to buy another PC186. If you have one for sale or can help in any other way please contact him at:

42 Milton Road
Herne Hill
London
SE24 0NP

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Letters to the Editor

At school we have a Nimbus PC 286 with Word 2 and Windows Write. Can anyone tell me how we can easily get Greek characters (used in many physics equations) on the screen and print-out (STAR LC24 pin).

I have checked the appendices in the manuals but there is nothing in Word about it nor is there in Windows Write. I have seen the ANSI character set in Windows but there does not seem to be much in the α,β or χ characters.

Regards Andrew Stefanowski
Ipswich School
01:YNC162

I don't have Word 2 but as far as I know it supports the full extended character set. In the Word 3 manual this is shown in Appendix A, in a Nimbus PC186 Owner's Handbook it is on pages TD1.4 and TD1.5. If you don't have any of these then try experimenting; in Word press and hold down the ALT key. Type the number 224 on the **numeric keypad** and then let go of the ALT key. This should show α. Trying the same process with the numbers up to 237 will give you most of the Greek characters you are likely to need. That's got them on the screen, now to print them. I'm not familiar with the Star but I assume it can also handle the extended character set (most printers can). Try just printing the document; if it works then rejoice. If not but you get (perhaps) lower case letters or italics then check your printer setup. For example, most Epson printers can be set to print the italic character set or a graphics set and you need to choose the graphics set to get the Greek letters etc. If you are printing using a serial printer lead then make sure that you are sending 8 data bits (on the PC186 use Config from your Welcome disc to set the printer interface. On a 286 you use the Mode command; I think it is MODE 9600,8,N,1,P) If all this fails then suspect your Word printer driver; try using the TTY driver (i.e select Print Options in Word and choose TTY). This does virtually nothing to the data apart from send it to the printer (so you lose italics etc.). If this finally gives you Greek then you definitely need to find a new printer driver for your printer. Does anyone else have any further ideas?

In Write your problems are probably worse; the Symbol font on a PostScript printer contains the Greek alphabet but this is little help. Does anyone else have any suggestions?

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Swaffield Primary School
St Ann's Hill
Wandsworth
London
SW18 2SA

Dear Sir

I have inherited a 480z network and would like to put one or two machines into classrooms as freestanding models.

Are you aware of a possible supplier or someone who may have second hand disc drives?

Yours faithfully,

Gary Cornford
Deputy Head

Any offers? There are probably quite a few disc drives lying around which are underused. Please get in touch with Mr Cornford if you can help.

Kingussie High School
Ruthven Road
Invernesshire
Highland Region
PH21 1ES

Dear Users

I am interested in information/help with keeping records of achievement and pupil profiling. If any one has any suitable software they would be willing to offer I would be eternally grateful. I should also like to get in touch with other users in Scotland.

Yours sincerely
Willie Anderson

I would like to help but on your membership form we say that the information collected is confidential so I do not feel able to give out lists of names and addresses without asking first. If anyone would like to get directly in touch with Mr Anderson then please write to him. Alternatively, please write and let me know that you are prepared to allow your name to be given out, either for people to write to you or in response to phone queries.

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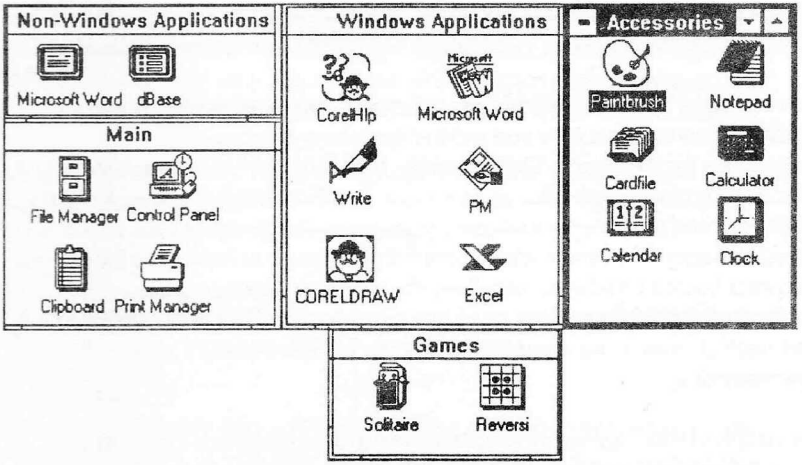
Windows 3

Stephen Rochford

As I mentioned in the last issue, Windows 3 has arrived. This article is being typed on a PC286 running Windows 3 and using Windows Write (I don't have any other applications which take advantage of the new Windows yet!) So what do you get that you didn't get with Windows 2 and do you need to upgrade? The first difference is the loss of the MSDOS executive; the list of files which greeted you when you started previous versions. The default setting gives you a "desktop" with lots of icons. Clicking on any of these will start a program running. Note the words *the default setting*. Some of the power of Windows now lies in its configurability. You can change the way the screen appears at startup so that it lists just the applications which you want to use and then when you exit from Windows you are given the opportunity to save the layout of your desktop.



(Technical note: taking a copy of the screen is now fairly easy. Pressing Print Screen in any Windows application puts the image onto the clipboard. From there you can just paste it into any other application. Unfortunately, PageMaker will not accept colour images from the clipboard so I had to paste the image into Paint, save it as a monochrome image, load it back and then copy it onto the clipboard again. It sounds easy but running in real mode means that you can't have Paint, PageMaker and the clipboard active all at the same time!)

The general appearance has been improved. For example, all the menu and dialogue box text is now in a proportionally spaced font which looks nicer and the buttons are shaded and appear to move when you click on them.

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The main menus still start with File and Edit but they have all gained a final item headed Help. This accesses a sort of hypertext help system which is very easy to use and contains enough information to make the manual useful only as a last resort. (This is no bad thing; the manual I've been using is rather poorly bound and has already started to shed pages, just days after I got it. I hope RM will put the manuals in ring binders soon). Internally there have been many changes.

Windows at last breaks the 640k memory barrier which has constrained many programs for a long time. When the program starts it decides what kind of machine it is running on and adjsuts itself to run either in 386 enhanced mode, standard mode or real mode. Standard mode needs at least 1Mb of memory with the top 384k set up as extended memory. Real mode is available on machines with just 640k or with machines using expanded memory. Using anything but real mode allows Windows to keep more applications in memory, each with a sizeable chunk of memory for use. There are problems, however. If you try and run an application which has not been written specifically for Windows 3 in anything other than real mode then a warning appears telling you that it may not work. PageMaker, for example, will start but will not open an existing publication, nor will it create a new publication.

Microsoft have let major software manufacturers have copies of the new Windows for some time now and most of them have been making preparations for the launch. Consequently, there are new versions available, either as programs which offer no major new functions but just run well with Windows 3 and are cheaply available, or as completely new versions which take advantage of the new environment fully. Unless you have got a lot of patience it is not advisable to disbelieve the warnings about possible problems; I am fairly patient but I got a little tired when my machine reset itself or just hung completely dozens of times while I was experimenting!

Having found that PageMaker would not run in standard mode I've been trying different ways of setting up this computer (which has 2Mb of RAM). I'm not certain that I've got it right but at the moment there is 640k of conventional memory and the rest as expanded. Of this 1024k is allocated to SmartDrive and the rest available to Windows. I can't make my mind up whether PageMaker is running faster than it did before so I don't know whether this is better or worse as a set up than any of the others which I have tried.

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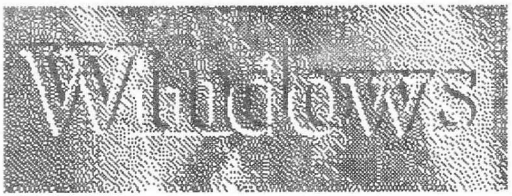
The manual is very helpful on setting up memory but it assumes that you will be making use of extended memory but this is not possible in real mode. I'll have to wait and see what happens when I get the new version of PageMaker. (Version 3.01 is available direct from Aldus at £20, version 4 is rumoured to be due in the Autumn)

Speed has certainly been improved for the accessories which come with Windows and they generally look better. Write now seems to be much faster, Paint is now a multicolour package (looking rather like PC Paintbrush on the PC186 but running much more smoothly). Terminal is now a fairly reasonable comms package, supporting Kermit and Xmodem for file transfer. There is a new package called Recorder which, as its name suggests, records all key and mouse operations. This lets you set up demos, for example, very easily. Control panel is much enhanced. The different functions seem to be more clearly arranged (again as a series of icons). One of the fun touches is that you can change the appearance of the desktop. There are a number of predefined patterns or you can design your own using the built in editor and you can even use a bitmap picture (created, for example, with Paint). This is great fun but be warned that the bitmap takes up memory that would otherwise be available for applications. You can draw a very small picture and let Windows tile it to fill the screen. Note that when you save the picture from Paint you must use the option to save it as a 256 colour bitmap otherwise your wallpaper will be black and white. Reversi is still there and there is a new game; Microsoft call it Solitaire, I call it Patience and it's great fun!

Print Manager replaces the old spooler. This is a great improvement. I do a lot of printing to PostScript printers at school and they are always a problem. In particular, with an Apple LaserWriter there is no indication of where your job has got to, just a green flashing light to tell you that the machine is thinking. With Print Manager the screen display tells you the date and time when your file started its journey to the printer and tells you how much of the file has been sent (for example, 34% of 12K). It is possible to adjust the priority of the spooler as before but now Windows remembers the setting when you quit.



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File Manager is a completely new program. It allows manipulation of files in a much easier fashion than the old executive. For example, clicking on a file and dragging it across the screen is all that it is needed to move it to a new disc or directory. Copying and deleting are similarly easy. I don't think it can quite replace Xtree just yet as a network manager's tool (it updates the screen very slowly for example after each file is deleted or moved and this becomes infuriating when much work is being done) but for day to day file tidying it's ideal.

Program Manager allows you to set up groups of programs. This is the way in which the sets of files on your desktop is controlled. It is very easy to use and on a network would be excellent because it is possible to set up different groups of programs for each user. This is done simply by putting the appropriate .INI file in their area and this allows Windows to find the applications wherever they may be. It is also possible to tell Windows that when it starts an application it should change to a particular directory to find or store data files and this canbe different from the location of the actual application.

In spite of all the new functionality Windows hasn't grown to be an unusable program. When you install it it creates a subdirectory called system which contains most of the program code and driver files. This contains about 135k on my system. This compares favourably with more than 500k taken up by WIN200.BIN and WIN200.OVL on a Windows 2 system. To be fair I'm not comparing like with like but Windows 3 is smaller than Windows 2 even when all the useful bits like File Manager are included.

I definitely like the package and I'll probably have more to say when I've used it some more (I've been using it for just two days). RM should be shipping Windows 3 for standalone M and X series machines by mid-July (upgrade price is £39 per machine) and for the PC186 by the Autumn term. At a schools' seminar in Glasgow we were told that they hoped to launch in September or October; I hope this isn't being too optimistic. Network versions should also be available at the same time. No network prices are available yet although RM say they will be competitive. (If I remember rightly the price for the Windows 2 upgrade was just £25 which was extremely competitive). If you have any thoughts on the merits or otherwise of Graphical User Interfaces, please write and let me know.

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Nimbus Software Library

Sheila Maynard

Volume 7 has just been added to the software library. Thanks to the generosity of John Hollingum, we have a new disk of libraries and programs written in Turbo Pascal Version 3. This version of Turbo Pascal runs directly on the Nimbus 186 and on the later machines in RM Mode.

Libraries

ATTRIB	enables the setting of attributes
BLOCK	read characters from a file while reading via BlockRead
BORDER	sets screen border colour
BOX	puts a box round a string on screen
CD	changes directory like DOS; not like the Turbo CHDIR.
CEH	allows more helpful messages than 'Abort Retry Ignore'
CLOCK	gets the time from the DOS clock
COMTO	provides timeout routines for comms programs
DATE	returns the date from the system clock in various formats
DBLIB	routines to read a DbaseII file.
DISCHNGE	detects the removal of a disk
EEROM	gets the contents of EEROMs
ENV	returns/sets the current value of an environment variable
EXISTS	checks if there is a read/write file
EXTCOM	executes .COM and .EXE files from a Pascal program
FKEYTRAN	a way of handling function keys
FKGM	presents the user with a menu, includes the use of function keys
FLA_DOSF	opening of Read-only files, including Untyped, extraction of file handles from file variables,opening of files using file handles. **BEWARE** do not give to potential hackers who may access important Read-only files.
FLA_IBMG	provides 'IBMGRAPH' routines needed by POPUP
FLORFILT	facilitates the creation of programs which can operate as filters or simple file manipulators
GENMENU	presents a menu which doesn't use function keys
GMENUTO	like GENMENU, includes timeouts - useful for logoff programs that get ignored or for programs which might present a security problem if left running
GNF	gets the next filename from the current or specified directory matching *.* or specified mask
GSAVEPC	provides graphics block manipulation commands and facilities for saving screen displays to disk
HEX	converts Hexadecimal strings to numbers
HEXSTR	converts integers to 4-digit Hexadecimal strings

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IA	a user interface which will display 'Press enter to continue' with the symbol on the <Enter> key instead of the word, returns an integer between 1 and a figure specified by the user.
LEFT	left justifies a field in a given width
LOG	Creates a WordStar log file of screen output.
MOUSE	a package of RM bios routines to handle a mouse
NETSTUF	reproduces some of the functions of the use command.
NTERML	terminal emulator library
PATIENCE	timeout facilities
POPUP	allows stacked background-restoring windows
PRNSU	allows the setting up of network printer setup strings
PSETUP	allows the setting up of a local printer when on the network - disconnects the network printer, sets up the baud rate and can restore the network printer afterwards
QCOPY	quick blockwise file copy
QSORT	an example of a quicksort algorithm
SAME	non case-sensitive string compare
STRN	a function version of STR
SUBS	finds and displays all subdirectories
S_TYPES	a few pre-defined types and one constant
TEXTRACK	allows the selection of items from screen
TFCOPY	characterwise text file copy; cann append to the file
TIMBER	deletes directory trees
T_TRANS	transmits to aux with timeout limit for comms programs
UIBOXES	a 'popup' version of YES
VIEW	allows user to browse through a text file
YES	gets a decision from the user, allows for a default value.

Programs

Some of these are useful items, but are rather specific to a particular Nimbus network and the way in which it is used. However these may demonstrate ways in which you could solve problems you may have.

The programs divide quite conveniently into categories as below.

Useful in .BAT files

DC	Directory Change - changes drive and directory and takes its data from standard input, not from the command line
GD	Get Drive - returns an error level from 1(A:) to 26(Z:)
NIM	takes a set of network addresses from the command line; returns 1 if the machine is a member of that set else 0
NIMADDR	displays network address of current machine
NIMRESP	error level menu program which uses popup window.

POPPAUSE popup window version of PAUSE, prompt disappears after you have pressed a key

DEFKEY allows the definition of Function keys in.BAT files

Utilities

ZENDSTAT displays network Zend Statistics, useful diagnostic data.

PICTEST displays what is coming from a selected piconet module

SUBDR lists subdirectories

TITLES pulls procedure and function headings out of program files

Comms Programs

VCADM terminal emulator, emulates a Volker Craig VC4404 in ADM3A mode, not fully tested since the library was updated

VC4404 terminal emulator which has been tested

VCINSTALL installs the object code above for different baud rates

MAIL232 allows connection to an Amstrad PCW with a serial interface

AMTRAN a version of the above, interfaces with PIP.

Text Processing

INTTALK demonstrates what can be done with a speech synthesiser

WSTOWR, WWTOWR, VWTOWR, OXWRTOWR, WRTOWS
- convert (to some extent) between word processors. The abbreviations mean:
WS: Wordstar; WR:Microsoft Windows Write; WW: WordWise; VW View; OXWR: Oxfordshire Write. The effects like bold are lost, paragraphs are usually kept

WSTOTXT converts Wordstar files to straight text

WC word count for text/Wordstar files

QM compiler for a simple authoring language that generates Pascal code for programs that present interactive questionnaires.

PREPRD for Word Printer Definition Files - the user can then work on the text version and include comments. This program will then strip out the comments leaving the text file for conversion to the internal format used by Word

User Assistance

HELP and MAKEIND
present Help files

DEMOLOAD and DEMOIND
will copy files from a public area to a user area to allow users to work on demonstration files without having to know where to find them

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LET YOUR MOUSE DO THE SEARCHING - Information Handling in a Windows Environment

What is Oriel?

Oriel consists of an advanced Information Handling (database) system together with a set of graphic display utilities

Is Oriel easy to use?

Oriel is both sophisticated and accessible. Using an English-like interrogation language you will find, in particular, the process of questioning data very simple.

At the touch of a few buttons you can browse freely through the data, ask both simple and complex questions, move data from one part of Oriel to another and simultaneously undertake a number of different tasks.

What other facilities does Oriel offer?

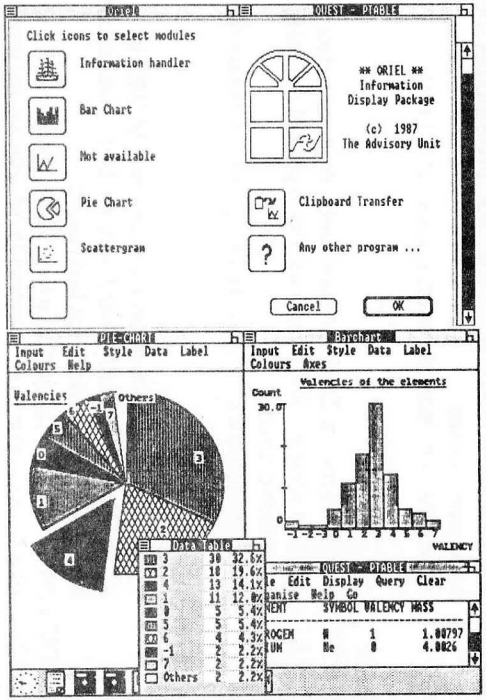
Oriel enables you to display data in, for example, pie-charts, bar-charts, line graphs and scattergrams.

Oriel can also be used to handle information created from another software package. You may wish, for example, to display data from a spreadsheet in Oriel's pie-chart.

Can I use QUEST data with Oriel?

Oriel is designed to run under Microsoft Windows. The package will run on any micro capable of operating MS Windows that has a memory of 640K.

To order **Oriel** or for further information, contact:



The Advisory Unit for Microtechnology in Education, Endymion Road, Hatfield, Herts AL10 8AU. Tel: (0702) 654443

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TM and PDFED

a menu program, it uses more memory than the RM program and is not easy to set up but produces menus which are 'friendly' for the user, uses a page-oriented approach

HEX2DBPO

links Turbo Pascal 3 programs into Dbase II programs

Miscellaneous

MANDEL Mandelbrot program
HARMON produces harmonograms
MOUSDEM demo of the MOUSElibrary
PRNSETUP demo of the PRNSU library

Logon/Logoff

CPD and CEPD

users may wish to login to the same area on a network to use a particular package and use the network for temporary storage. these programs create separate subdirectories based on the station's net address. Work of one cannot then corrupt another

CLEANUP and WINCLEAN

logoff programs which wipe contents of network drive giving the user the chance to copy files over

WRITESO logon program for use with IDs using Windows Write
LASER5 runs on a standalone Nimbus to service a postscript laser printer
DEMANDA similar to WRITESO but aimed at PageMaker use

Volume 8 consists of a demonstration disk for ThinkSheet.

The disk has all the features of the full Thinksheet, except that work cannot be saved, or printed on a printer. Thinksheet was reviewed in the last edition of the RMUG magazine.

Each Nimbus Library Volume costs £5, with an extra charge of £2.50 if you do not send a formatted 3.5" disk. Please make cheques payable to RMUG. The address for the software library is given at the back of the magazine.

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HG2 8DD

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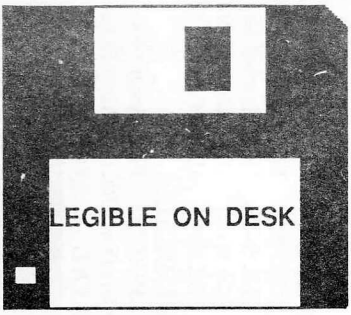
BIG END OR LITTLE END ?

Jake Loddington

In *"Gulliver's Travels"*, there is an account of a war which was sparked off by a dispute about which end of a boiled egg to open. You may think that what follows is equally trivial, but to me it's one of life's petty irritations which I could well do without. It's on a par with the lack of standardisation of hot and cold taps, or which way round the spine of a book is printed, and so on.



What I am leading up to, of course, is the way we (or they) label our 3.5" floppy disks. Do you subscribe to the LIB (Legible in Box) method, or do you belong to the LOD (Legible on Desk) school? A quick survey of commercial disks shows that only a tiny minority use LIB, whilst a massive 90% of suppliers, including RM, label their disks so as to be almost unreadable when in a disk box!

Clearly my preference is for the LIB system. The need to read the label is at its most evident when the disk is filed along with 100 or so of its fellows. And if you've ever tried rooting through a densely packed disk box with the labels upside down, or with the disks upside down so that the labels are the right way round but at the bottom, you'll know what I mean.

In any case, there should be no need for the LOD labelling system. In an ideal world, a disk should never be left exposed on a desk top; it should be either in the box or in the drive. Or so we tell our students.

However, no-one is perfect, and I confess that there have been occasions when the odd disk (or even more than one) has been seen on my desk.

One difficulty is that the companies who print the labels which accompany boxes of blank disks insist on including the word "Label", and this is upside down as well!

So I hope that I've made a case for a new British Standard. And as always, if the British Standard gets it wrong, I shall maintain my independence by continuing to label my disks so that they are Legible In Box.

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The Managers Network (2)

John Williams

Allowing for the time it takes to get from my keyboard to the page in front of you it's not surprising that I haven't had a flood of letters and calls from other network managers. This gives me chance to try a format for our column.

Random Access

(Ideas thrown in for general discussion)

As RM sell the idea of a plug in and go network, should they not address the problem caused by every server shipped having the same set of offers and passwords. It should be a fairly easy job for a programmer with access to RM's source code to produce a program which could reacd the offers file and re-randomise offers and passwords. This could be run after installation once everything was working, and at any future time if there were worries about security. For those really new to the game these are not the passwords you allocate but the random looking numbers in the offers file, which get to your network via a backed-up copy of RM's original one.

Got an old 480Z doing not a lot? Got a disk drive for it? Connect it to your Nimbus network and run the ANALYSER program. It's very comforting to be able to see something going on whilst everyone is waiting for Pagemaker to load. Running it for some time (months not minutes) I discovered that I could interpret what was happening just by looking at the display. I found it very easy to spot a CTRL/ALT/DEL as the re-booting station jumps to the top of the display for a few seconds. If someone could be persuaded to put it in an eprom you wouldn't even need the disk drive!

Feedback

A couple of issues ago Jake Loddington was listing his troubles with Word. As we have around 40 Nimbii on our network and at any time more than half of them are running Word and producing mountains of good looking output, (I'd need to ask their lecturers opinion on content) I thought there must be something I could help him with. One thing which came to light was a problem I have spotted but have never seen mentioned:-

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If you send to the network printer, then sit with fingers poised over CTRL/ ALT/PRTSC and hit the keys as soon as you get a glimpse of the Command menu, there is every chance you will be ignored. Not only that but the print-out will be delivered the next time you start to print. This produces confusion in the mind of the recipient as they often mistake it for the next print-out and wonder why it still has their old mistakes in it. If you get into this syndrome the sure cure seems to be to quit Word and reload. This problem did not seem to exist in Word 2.

Printers Points
(Excuse the pun)
We have "discovered" cut-sheet-feeders. We have been running two NEC P5s with them for about three years, and have recently bought them for our new Panasonics.
Advantages
Use cheap A4 (Not from computing budget.)
Output looks good in folders.
Separator sheets can be reused. (No banner)
Colured paper and letterheads can be slipped in. (see below)

Disadvantages
Fifteen inch types prone to jamming if wide output is sent to A4 paper. (A4 only types are OK)
Hoppers need frequent reloading, some care needed.
Nearly doubles the price of a cheap printer. (Worth it if you have the volume).

We have developed a trick for using letterheads or coloured paper. Type the document, then add to the start, a dozen or so returns, a message like "Fred's letter follows" and force a page break. When the message starts to print open the hopper and insert your headed paper, then put the printer back on line.

DOS Prompts
Have you ever used the FOR command in MSDOS. If you haven't its worth investigating. I use it to create or remove sets of numbered directories.
eg.

```
FOR %d IN (1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10) DO MD USER%d
```

will create directories USER1 to USER10.
It does have an annoying feature. It can spot files:-

```
FOR %f IN (*.*) DO IF EXIST A:%f DEL %f
```

ie. if I've already copied it to A: then DELete it

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It won't do the same for directories.

```
FOR %d IN (USER*.) DO RD %d
```

won't remove the directories created in the first example, even though an MSDOS directory is just a file, (or so they tell us.) Anyone got a bright idea?

It's darned useful for shifting files around:- One of our lecturers gave his group a copy each of an empty dBaseIII file, numbered to match their ID's, and got them to input 10 records each. He then wanted to bring all of their files to the root directory, append them to a master file and give them back a copy each. The commands for moving the files went like this,

```
FOR %d IN (1 2 ..... 12 13) DO COPY USER%d\EXAMPLE%d.DBF
```

that got them all into the root. Once he had combined them they were copied back with,

```
FOR %d IN (1 2 ..... 12 13) DO COPY MASTER.DBF USER%d
```

The last thing to do was tidy up their directories with,

```
FOR %d IN (1 2 ..... 12 13) DO DEL USER%d\EXAMPLE%d.DBF
```

I couldn't use RMTREE as some users in the group were a week behind and we didn't want to delete the files they were still working on.

Well, that's enough from me. Here's hoping there's enough feed-back to save me having to write it all next time.
Instant feedback - I *HATE* sheet feeders! We have 2 Epsons with sheet feeders in school. They jam more frequently than the tractor and they are always slower than tractor fed paper. Does anyone else have any thoughts? The CTRL ALT PRTSC problem mentioned seems much more prevalent on the machines with older firmware (machines with 1.32D rarely show this problem). Why didn't Microsoft (who wrote the network system as well as Word) make the program handle printer output properly on the network??

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Keyboard string input within batch files

by JM Turner

The May 1990 issue of RM User Magazine included a plea for a program which would take a string and store it in an environment variable.
This can be done in a limited way using msdos's redirection capability and two utilities called PUT and INPUT which I have written for the Nimbus PC186.
Utility PUT uses the > redirection operator to create a batch file (xset.bat in the example below, but you can choose a name to suit yourself) containing the partially formed command
set variable=
Note that PUT does not append a return-line-feed sequence unless explicitly told to do so - see below.
Utility INPUT waits for you to type a string, terminated by return. The >> redirection operator appends the string onto the end of xset.bat, which is then executed.
Example

```
put > xset.bat "set variable="
input >> xset.bat
xset
```

Note that (in msdos version 3.1 at least), xset must be the last statement in the batch file, otherwise the remainder of the batch file will not be executed. Normally this problem is avoided by using the command processor:

```
command /c xset
```

Unfortunately that will not work in this case, since command.com builds a new environment for itself, which evaporates when control returns to the batch file. If you want to continue executing batch files, you might try:

```
put > xset.bat "set variable="
input >> xset.bat
put >> xset.bat "|M|J another"
xset
```

which would execute the set command and then look for a batch file called another.bat (|M|J tells PUT to send control M control J, which is return-line-feed).
If you send me a disk I will return it with the two utilities PUT and INPUT, including their assembler source code.

JM Turner
340 Clifton Drive North
St Annes-on-Sea
Lancashire
FY8 2PB

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SetEVar and EnvCond - more batch file input!

John Hollingum

Like Stephen Rochford, I dislike the claim that something *cannot be done* but this environment variable business has me pretty close to conceding it. John Williams wanted to ask the user where they wanted the temporary files (usually ram disk). On the face of it, it seems we only need some C hacker to come along and write a 5 line program to take a string from the keyboard and stuff it in an environment variable. The trouble is that there is no orthodox way that a program can do this, because the splendid MS-DOS operating system does not offer you this facility. The problem is put succinctly by Microsoft themselves in the Microsoft MS-DOS programmers' reference (page 4-3): *'a program cannot change the MS-DOS environment values as the set command does'*

If Microsoft say it can't be done, it can't be done. There follow descriptions of four strategies to deal with the problem. Two of them involve using programs that I have written (and contributed to the software library). Which technique you choose is dependent on why you want to set the environment variable in the first place. If you just want to 'condition the environment' before running a specific program, method 3 is probably best. If you need to have the variables set in a different condition after your BAT file has finished (eg you want to select a new printer) you will have to use 2. Always try method 1 first.

1) Forget this idea and do it another way completely. If inter-action really is required, and the cardinality of the variable is small (look it up) use Nortons ASK or one of a million other programs like it (for example NIMRESP in the software library) and have the program set the environment variable to one of the possible values:

```
ASK  "Select printer:  L)aser E)pson EX H)P DeskJet", LEH
IF ERRORLEVEL 3 GOTO HEWLETT
IF ERRORLEVEL 2 GOTO EPSON
IF ERRORLEVEL 1 GOTO LASER
:HEWLETT
SET PRINT=HPDJ
GOTO ONWARD
:EPSON
SET PRINT=EPSON
GOTO ONWARD
:LASER
SET PRINT=LASER
:GOTO ONWARD
:ONWARD
```


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2) Use SetEnvVar. This is fairly complex but just about tolerable. This program takes the view that if no program can set an environment variable as SET does then we'd better use SET. But how do we get strings provided by the user into it? We have an automatically generated BAT file. Rather than try to explain, here's an example:

```
BAT1.BAT:
     Echo off
     echo Look at the environment now
     set
     SetEnvVar N:tempbat p:\bat2 fred
     REM location of temporary file, 'next' file to run,
     REM name of environment variable to set.
     N:tempbat

BAT2.BAT
     Echo off
     echo look at them now
     set
```

The call to SetEnvVar creates a file on N: called TEMPBAT.BAT. SetEnvVar asks the user for a string to put in the environment variable called FRED and then writes the following to TEMPBAT:

```
     ECHO OFF
     SET FRED=<whatever the user typed>
     BAT2
```

So when BAT1 Calls TEMPBAT, the environment variable gets set and the BAT file BAT2 gets invoked. Remember that BAT files that reference each other will CHAIN and don't CALL. For example there is no point in putting any commands after N:TEMPBAT in BAT1 because control will never return to BAT1.

We have quite a few complications here. For a start we have BAT files sundered into several pieces, resulting in a loss of control of flow-of-control. Also we need to know the name of a disk drive that we can reliably write to, you could use N:, you might try using silicon disk, but you need to know where it is first..... It is also a good idea to delete the temporary BAT file in the 'second' bat file.

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3) Use EnvCond. This doesn't permanently change the environment, but it probably changes it for as long as you need it. The important bit in the quote from Microsoft is 'as the set command does'. EnvCond *can* set environment variables, but they are only active for the environment of EnvCond and its descendents. So you have to also supply EnvCond with the name of the Program you want it to run under the 'conditioned' environment. This can be a COM, EXE or BAT. Eg:

```
EnvCond P:Mandel.com TEMP PRINTER
```

This would prompt to the user for values for TEMP and PRINTER after which the program MANDEL.COM would be run. Yes, you lose some memory this way, and no, you can't pass command line parameters to the program, although there is no technical reason why not. The changes to the specified environment variables are temporary. This could be an advantage or disadvantage depending on the circumstances. A word of warning: don't change PATH or COMSPEC, it can cause a computer to totally hang!

And finally.. John Williams answers his own question.

I knew someone had, (written a program to insert strings into the environment space), as soon as my copy of RM User had arrived I got a phone call from John Turner to say he had a program that did it within limitations. A few days later Ken Deciacro (hope that's right Ken) phoned to say look in the WINSETUP directory on a 386. I've got no 386s, apart from the servers, but a PC286 seemed a good bet, and there it was, WHAT.EXE. Thanks Ken.

Typing WHAT makes it display the syntax. and one of its functions is to put a string into a variable called WHAT. you can then use the variable as %WHAT% in your batch files. For example:

```
echo off
cls
rem personal Steed batch file
echo You need to give STEED a filename
WHAT /S
P:STEED %WHAT%
```

I think that's probably enough on batch files and environment variables for now! For those of you new to the world of MSDOS - *Don't Panic!* Most of the time you don't need to write batch files at all. Your network comes set up ready to go and the only time you will need to write a bacth file is if you get some new software. If it comes from a source such as ILECC there will be a suitable batch file on the disc. If it doesn't then decide whether it runs in IBM mode or RM mode, find a batch file that exists for such a program and just change the file names (e.g. when I wanted to install WordStar I copied most of the DataEase file and changed all references to DEASE to WS. It may not be elegant but it will probably work! Remember the saying: "If it works, don't fix it" so leave your network alone unless you really need to change it!

NETWORK MANAGEMENT IN A LARGE SCHOOL

Stephen Hughes (I.T. Coordinator)

Shelley High is a 13-18 High School with 1300 pupils, 260 being in the sixth form.The school has had installed for two years a NIMBUS network (version 2.2) which is in the proccess of being extended to most parts of the school.

The policy of the school is to allow open access to computing facilities, the network being seen as a way of implementing this policy. One of the consequences of this policy is that each pupil (and members of staff) need their own user area on the system.

In a large school keeping track of 1300 identities and passwords was going to be a daunting, if not impossible task for the network managers. At Shelley there are three managers; the I.T. coordinator, the I.T. technician (shared with science) and a sixth form student. Further delegation of network management on the RM system was not deemed to be prudent due to the total control a network manager has over the system, being able to intervene in all aspects of user access, menu construction, data security etc.

What was needed, and what is being implemented is a sub-level of network management. A suite of management programs has been written which allows lower level management. What follows is an outline of the three tier management system which has been devised.

At the top level there is the RM NET management system. Each tutor group in the school is designated as a GROUP area (45 of these) and within these groups a single user is defined by the senior network manager using the RM management program. The identity of this user is given the tutor group name eg 89TG. Any user typing this IDENTITY at the normal log-on screen will get into this user area.

The second level of management can be delegated to a group of sixth-formers for instance. By entering a user area, which we have called MAILMGR a suite of programs can be summoned which allow for the creation of new users in any of the previously designated tutor group USER AREAS. Besides allowing for the creation of new users, other standard facilities are available: deletion of old users, the changing of user passwords, the selection of an appropriate RM "blue menu" suite for the user, allowing access to the network mailbox program.

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A pupil using the network will first of all log on with his/her tutor group's user identity. At this stage the 'multistreaming' program takes over. A second log-on screen appears prompting the user for a PERSONAL IDENTITY. These identities are constructed as FSURNAME (F being the first letter of the forename and SURNAME being the first 7 letters of the surname of the user.) The program then puts the user into a subdirectory of 89TG and displays a standard RM blue menu. To the user there is no further difference from the standard RM network.

If no PERSONAL IDENTITY on the system has been defined, a third tier manager can intervene by typing the personal identity "USEREDIT". This then drops the user into a management menu screen. The options available are:

1. Create a new user
2. Delete an existing user
3. Change Password

However before any management can be done a password is needed. This password is maintained by a senior network manager, but is made available to those people (mainly staff) who would be involved with groups and would need this basic facility.
The individual being installed on the network is then allowed to type their name as for example James Thistlethwaite. The program then creates a subdirectory in 89TG as JTHISTLE. "JTHISTLE" is also that individual's PERSONAL IDENTITY and MAILBOX ID (more of that later). The path to this directory is M:\89TG\89TG\JTHISTLE. The individual can also create a password.

The newly created user gets a default 'blue menu' suite with all the basic programs on. This user is also, by default put onto the mailbox system. The management at this third tier is confined to a single GROUP area. This level of management is found particularly useful when a new class arrives in the computer room with a large number of pupils having to be installed on the network. We find pupils quite enjoy introducing themselves to the computer!

Overall this system allows the senior network managers to construct the framework to the network user areas, but the nitty-gritty of individual users can be controlled by class teachers or a limited number of sixth formers.

The MAILBOX system
The multistreamed user areas were initially created to allow every user to have their own mailbox ID on the network. The mailbox program written in-house closely simulates a CAMPUS 2000 mailbox system, though is probably

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more friendly!
Text files can be written and sent to any other user on the network. At present over 500 pupils are "installed" as users. The mailbox ID is the same as the individual's Personal ID for logging on to the network. The mailbox program will allow a search of user mailbox ID's. Some of these are inevitably rather obscure, being truncated to 8 letters, but lists can be published by sub-network managers of ID's and names.

The mailbox filenames identify the intended recipient by their ID, while the filename .extension includes a number (to accomodate receiving more than one item of mail) and letters identifying whether the item is express (when the user will get a beep when loading the mailbox program). The mailbox directory might contain the following files:

JTHISTLE.X01	(express)
JTHISTLE.U01	(unread mail item)
JTHISTLE.R02	(read mail item)

On loading the mailbox program a screen reports the state of the individual's mailbox. (The program only reports and allows access to the user's personal files). They then have the option to use the following commands: SCAN headings, READ, REPLY, SEND, COPY items to files for wordprocessing, PRINT, DELETE.
On sending or replying to mail the user can request an express mail shot and/or an acknowledgement.

So far nobody has exceeded the 99 files that can be received but it has been a close thing at times! It has proved extremely popular. The second tier management however can delete all read mail items or items more than a week old. The mailbox can even be shut down if necessary, while individuals can have their access to the mailbox program withdrawn.

I am indebted to Richard Harwood our ex-sixthformer who wrote the programs and to Chris Richards a present sixthformer who has removed many of the gremlins from the programs. The school now has an extremely acceptable network management system with the bonus of a sophisticated mailbox program.

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Writing for the magazine

This magazine is made up of what you send me plus bits and pieces of news which I find. If you don't like what you see then write and let me know and, if you can, write something for me to print. This issue has a large area devoted to the problems of batch files. As I said at the end of that part, you may find it confusing; if so don't worry because you may not need to know it. If you do need to know it but don't understand what to do then give us a ring. John Williams started the whole thing off in the last issue. Within 24 hours of the magazine appearing 2 people had phoned him to offer suggstions (both of which are printed here). As it says at the beginning of the magazine, we may not know the answers but we probably do know someone who does.

If you are writing for me then the ideal is to send a disc produced using Microsoft Word. This magazine is cobbled together with the aid of a style sheet in PageMaker and I find that I can cope with almost any character format so just set it out tidily and I'll do the rest. If you use a word processor other than Word then that's also fine. I can read WordStar and Oxfordshire Write from 480z or Nimbus and Windows Write.

If you just want to air your views then do send them along; provocative comments are always welcome and if you've got anything slightly less serious then I'm quite happy to fill up an odd corner like that as well.

In short, get those fingers tapping. Remember, we pay £5 per printed page for articles (although all payments are at the Editor's discretion)

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Please fill in a number next to the computer names below; the first box is for standalone computers, the second, if present, is for networked machines.

380z	☐	480z	☐☐	Nimbus PC186	☐☐	Nimbus PC286	☐☐
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Please tick the areas in which you are interested.

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Please tick the best description of yourself or your institution.

Sole Trader	☐	Limited Company	☐	Primary School	☐	Charity	☐
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Please send your form to: **Stephen Rochford, RMUG Membership Secretary, George Stephenson Community High School, Southgate, Killingworth, NE12 0SA**

You may photocopy this form if you do not want to cut your magazine.

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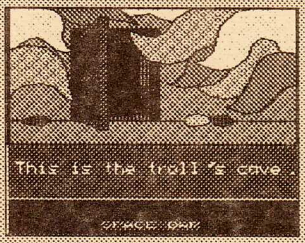

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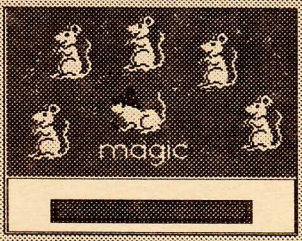

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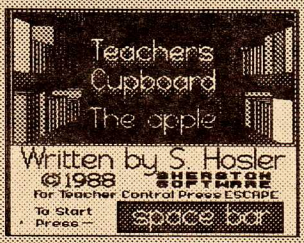

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